
LESSON 7

MEF DEFENSIVE COMBAT OPERATIONS

Invincibility lies in the defensive; the possibility of victory in the attack. One defends when his strength is inadequate; he attacks when it is abundant.

--Sun Tzu

The defense is not a simple shield, but a shield made up of well directed blows... A sudden powerful transition to the defense--the sudden flashing sword of vengeance--is the greatest moment for the defense.

--Clausewitz

We conclude that there exists no clear division between the offense and the defense. Our theory of war should not attempt to impose one artificially. The offense and the defense exist simultaneously as necessary components of each other, and the transition from one to the other is fluid and continuous.

--MCDP 1, Warfighting

Introduction

Purpose

This lesson

wPresents doctrinal fundamentals for conducting defensive combat operations

wExplains why the MEF commander considers conducting defensive operations and the types of operations he may select

wProvides the foundation needed to build a defensive combat option for the MEF commander

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Introduction, Continued

**Why Study
MEF Defensive
Combat
Operations?**

wThe conduct of operations requires a thorough understanding of the defense because in the art of campaigning and strategy, the defense and the offense are intertwined and interdependent.

wExamining defensive operations will provide a tactical option for the MEF commander, while perhaps maintaining the offense at the operational level.

**Relationship
to Other
Instruction**

wThis lesson provides a basic foundation for defensive operations. As noted in this lesson, the distinction between offensive and defensive combat blurs at the operational level.

wYou will learn about the interdependence of offensive and defensive means, and the relationship between the conduct of the tactical defense and the operational offense in MEF's single battle concept later in this course.

wThis course is especially useful for your study of The *Pusan Perimeter* Case Study: Delay and Defend, lesson 8.

Study Time

This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require approximately 4.5 hours of study.

Educational Objectives

Purpose and Fundamentals	Understand the purpose of defensive operations and the fundamentals of the defense.
Doctrine	Understand the framework of the defense and associated doctrinal issues.
Types of Defensive Operations	Comprehend how the concepts of offensive action and maneuver apply to the two types of defensive operations. [JPME 1(a) and 2(b)]
Advantages and Disadvantages	Describe the advantages and disadvantages of the various forms of defensive maneuver.
Forms of Maneuver	Explain how the combination of defensive forms of maneuver allow GCE to emphasize the offensive component of the defense. [JPME 1(a) and 1(e)]
Operational/ Tactical Concept	Understand the concept of simultaneous operational offensive and tactical defense in MAGTF operations. [JPME 3(e)]
Security Forces Missions	Understand the missions that may be assigned to security forces for security operations. [JPME 1(a)]
Force Distribution	Understand how forces are distributed within the framework of the MEF conducting the defense.
JPME Areas/ Objectives/Hours (accounting data)	1/a/1.0 1/e/0.3 2/b/0.2 3/e/0.5

Historical Background

Doctrine	<p>WAs cited in several doctrinal sources, the defense is considered the less decisive form of combat when compared to the offense; yet in theory (Clausewitz), it is the strongest form of combat.</p>
Marine Corps and Defensive Combat	<p>wWhile the Marine Corps is justifiably famous for its offensive capabilities, some of its most famous battles have been defensive. Marines fought in the unsuccessful defense of Washington, D.C. during the War of 1812. In 1900, a Marine detachment defended Peking's foreign enclave during the Boxer Rebellion.</p> <p>wDuring the opening weeks of World War II, scattered Marine units in places like Wake Island and the Philippines fought a hopeless struggle against overwhelming odds. In the seesaw battles of the Korean War, Marines were frequently on the defensive at places like Pusan and the Chosin Reservoir.</p> <p>wOne of the most significant battles of the Vietnam War was the Marines' successful defense of Khe Sanh. The Marines and others participated in Operation <i>Desert Shield</i> that made Operation <i>Desert Storm</i> possible.</p>
Why Defend?	<p>At the highest level of competency, commanders understand that protection of the force and preventing the threat from gaining an advantage requires sound execution of the defense to achieve a decision.</p>

Discussion

Focus

This lesson focuses on why the MEF commander considers conducting defensive operations and what types of operations may be selected. This lesson is intended to provide the foundation needed to build a defensive combat option for the MEF commander. When, why, and how the MEF conducts defensive operations are considerations that both MAGTF staff officers and commanders must be familiar with.

Readings

The readings provide you with essential background information on the doctrine and fundamentals of defensive operations. The information is presented on several levels and in varying degrees of details.

wFMFM 6 is the Marine Corps' doctrine for defensive operations and discusses the fundamentals of the defense from a conceptual point of view.

wThe Army doctrine on defensive operations is contained in more detail in FM 100-5.

wFM 100-15 discusses defensive operations at the Corps level.

By their nature, defensive combat operations are ground-oriented as described in these doctrinal publications. Although there is some content overlap, you should understand how this doctrine applies at each level.

Concepts

Key concepts of defensive operations are summarized in the following section to help guide your study and understanding of defense.

Concepts of Defensive Operations

Offense and Defense

Offense and defense are neither mutually exclusive nor clearly distinct; as we shall see, each includes elements of the other. [FMFM 1, Warfighting]

wOffense is a positive aim, striking power requiring quick decisive action. Defense, on the other hand, has a negative aim; it is a resisting force requiring less decisive action. This is not a value judgment in the sense that positive equals good and negative equals bad, rather a recognition of the differences in goals.

wOn the fundamental level, defenders resist the striking power of the offense. Offense and defense work together; every defender has offense potential. Remember,

wOffense yields decisions
wDefense yields culminating points

"Parrying a Blow" and "Awaiting the Blow"

Although this is the characteristic view of the defense, "parrying of a blow" is not an all-inclusive view. It is only a view of the resisting nature of the defense.

"Awaiting the blow" emphasizes the initial loss of initiative the defender must accept. "Awaiting the blow" and "parrying the blow" are the simplest ways of looking at the defense.

The defense is inherently the stronger form of combat. Were this not the case, there would be no reason ever to assume the defense. The offense with its positive aim would always be preferable. [FMFM 1, Warfighting]

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Concepts of Defensive Operations, Continued

Seven Reasons to Defend

Results of a defensive operation can be any of the following:

- wCause the enemy attack to fail
- wGain time
- wDeny an area
- wEconomize forces
- wControl key terrain
- wEnsure integrity of objectives
- wTrap and destroy

Each of these reasons is described below.

Cause the Enemy to Fail

Defensive operations can stretch the enemy's resources to the breaking point, expose a reluctant enemy, and force the enemy to show its hand.

Gain Time

Defensive operations serve as a shield for other maneuvers and allow time for shaping while resisting enemy design. Enabling force holds for follow-on forces.

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Concepts of Defensive Operations, Continued

Deny an Area	<p>In maneuver warfare there is key terrain which gives an advantage to whoever controls and defends it. The terrain feature may be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">wGeographicwManmadewCulturalwRelated to Time/Distance <p>Key terrain may be "important" to the defender, but could give an advantage to the enemy.</p>
Economize Forces	<p>It's cheaper to defend--less in forces and less material--both of which can be used elsewhere. This economy of forces doesn't imply a static posture.</p>
Control Key Terrain	<p>This is related to area denial. In this case though, both the defender and attacker would benefit from the use of the terrain feature.</p>
Ensure Integrity of Objectives	<p>Enabling force seizes a seaport or airfield, then what? Once taken, provide protection from counterattack.</p>
Trap and Destroy	<p>Trick the enemy into entering a trap; hold his forces in position while the counterattack destroys them.</p>

Concepts--How Do We Defend?

Clausewitz Theory	The defense is <i>not a simple shield, but a shield made up of well-directed blows.</i>
Aggressive Defense	To be successful in the defense you may have to "await the blow," but you don't have to passively absorb it. The technique is to "duck and weave," let the attacker expend energy on hollow or glancing blows and then you "counterpunch."
Rules	<p>When preparing to take a defensive stance, apply the following rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">wSelect the battlefield.wForce (induce) the attacker to conform.wExploit the attacker's weaknesses.wCounterattack immediately.
Select the Battlefield	<p>wPick the battlefield that offers you the most and the enemy the least.</p> <p>wWhen defending, you may not have the fullest opportunity to "select" the battlefield. Work with what you've got. Remember, the single battle applies just as much in the defense as in the offense.</p>
Pick the Position	Cross-compartment and corridor defend corridor, attacks cross-compartmentally --nobody wants to do that. Pick the position that most enhances your capability and degrades the enemy's. In fact, offer the ground the enemy will most favor.

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Concepts--How Do We Defend?, Continued

Force the Attacker to Conform

Once you have selected the ground, push the enemy to go the way you want. Never interrupt an opponent in the middle of a mistake.

Exploit Weaknesses

Everyone has weaknesses. Find the enemy's weaknesses and use them to your advantage.

Counterattack Immediately

When the enemy is the weakest, return to the offense. If you've resisted strongly enough, the enemy will reach a culminating point. Don't allow him to recover.

Factors

Consider the following factors:

- wEnemy
- wManeuver
- wPreparation
- wMass and concentration
- wFlexibility
- wOffensive action
- wTerrain
- wMutual support
- wDefense in depth
- wSurprise

Most Important Factor

wOf all factors considered, none is more important than the **enemy**. The planning and execution of your defense should be focused on the enemy. Ask the following:

- wWhat are the enemies' capabilities?
- wWhat do you think he will do?
- wWhat do you want him to do?
- wWhat will you do in relation to his actions?

wInitially, the initiative belongs to the attacker--but that's temporary.

Concepts--Determine How to Conduct A Defensive Operation

Categories Once you complete your estimate on the enemy, determine how you will conduct your defensive operation. Three broad categories determine how to conduct a defensive operation. Implied is the understanding that much more goes into the conduct of the defense, but the three categories below are only the starting point of an organized defense.

wOrganization of the ground
wDistribution of forces
wForm of maneuver

Organization of the Ground In defensive tactics, the ground is organized into three areas.

wSecurity
wMain battle
wRear

In the single battle, depending on the concept, all three defensive tactics could be located within the "close" area. All are located within a defender's area of operations.

Forms of Maneuver There are two forms of maneuver.

wDefend
wRetrograde

Although there are only two forms, many components of a defensive scheme fall within these two forms. Elements of each form may be found in the other. These two forms are discussed later in this lesson.

Concepts--Plan and Prepare for a Defensive Operation

Planning Elements

Consider the following when planning for a defensive operation.

- wScheme of maneuver
- wAccentuate strengths
- wPositions
- wRoutes
- wBranches and sequels
- wObstacles/barriers
- wFire support plan
- wShape, force, kill, enable
- wAreas with a purpose
- wIntegrated with a purpose

Types of Defense

If you do not attack, then you must defend. There are two types of defense.

- wDeliberate
- wHasty

Deliberate

The deliberate defense is used when

- wNot in contact with enemy
- wTime is available to recon for a good position
- wA strong defense can be established
- wFreedom to choose is allowed

Hasty

The hasty defense is used when

- wIn contact with the enemy
- wTime is limited

A hasty defense can grow into a deliberate defense if needed.

Concepts--Conduct the Defensive Operation

Elements

When conducting the defense, consider the following elements.

- wSecurity Forces
- wTransfer of control
- wLong-range fires
- wForcing the enemy
- wConcentration
- wOffering an invitation
- wCounterattack
- wAttack or reestablish the defense

Explanation

wSecurity operations are integral to the defense. Initially, the main effort may be security and as withdrawn, control becomes an issue.

wIf you desire long-range fires, do so with a purpose, likewise if you want the element of surprise.

wRemember that the characteristic of defense is "awaiting the blow," do all you can to make the enemy do what you want.

wMass in the defense is a problem, don't be a target; cover the area, but mass when needed.

wFires, mobile reserves--better yet offer an invitation to attack where you want.

wOnce the enemy is exposed, extended, committed--counterattack a weakness.

wDepending on scheme, attack to transition to offense or reestablish the defense.

Forms of Maneuver: Defend

Elements The defend form of maneuver consists of

wSector
wBattle position
wStrongpoint

Sector The key elements of sector are

wMaximum latitude
wMETT-T-S/L, which consists of

wMission
wEnemy
wTerrain and Weather
wTroops and available support
wTime
wSpace
wLogistics

Battle Position Listed below are battle position concerns:

wA place to fight
wSecurity operates outside
wMay be temporary
wDenies access/prevents advance
wOccupation = improvement

Strongpoint In defense, a strongpoint is critical terrain that must be held "at all cost," even for extended periods and at the risk of being cut off.

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Forms of Maneuver: **Defend**, Continued

Position Defense

Position defense

- wDenies enemy access
 - wIs static with small mobile reserve
 - wRequires mutual support
 - wGives depth
 - wMaintains the position and allows for control of terrain
 - wReserves blunts and contains
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When to Use Position Defense

Position defense is used when

- wTerrain is critical
 - wLess mobile than enemy
 - wSpace is limited
 - wTerrain is restrictive
 - wSurprise permits
 - wTerrain doesn't permit mutual support for attacker
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Results

Listed below are the strengths and weaknesses of the position defense:

- wBrute force--maximum resisting power
 - wMutual support and depth
 - wEconomy of force
 - wNot full annihilation or destruction
 - wAbdicates initiative
 - wRelies on others for decision
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Forms of Maneuver: **Defend**, Continued

Mobile Defense	Mobile defense destroys by offensive action. The mobile defense objective is destruction of the enemy. Terrain is not critical--but it is important. Positional aspect supports a mobile defense with focus on the enemy. It provides the capability to resume the offense.
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Results	The strengths and weaknesses of the mobile defense
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- wDecides

- wGains initiative

- wEmphasizes offense

- wRequires large forces and mobility

- wHas information requirements

- wRecon and counter-recon requirements are key

Forms of Maneuver: Retrograde

Elements	<p>The retrograde form of maneuver consists of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">wDelaywWithdrawalwRetirement
Delay	<p>A delaying operation is when a force under pressure trades space for time by slowing down the enemy's momentum and inflicting maximum damage on the enemy without, in principle, becoming decisively engaged.</p>
Withdrawal	<p>A withdrawal operation is a planned operation in which a force in contact disengages from an enemy force.</p>
Retirement	<p>Retirement is an operation when a force out of contact moves away from the enemy. A retrograde retirement is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">wInitiated while not in contactwUsually covered by anotherwTactical not administrativewForced to be employed elsewhere
Use of the Reserve	<p>The use of the reserve is key to defensive operations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">wWeaker = ImportancewUncertainty = StrengthwCommitment = Re-establishmentwTiming = EmploymentwEmployment = DecisionwSecurity = RiskwReserves = Exploitation and Offense

Required Readings

**MCDP 1,
*Warfighting***

MCDP 1, *Warfighting*, Chapter 2, pp. 32 to 35. These pages discuss actions of war regarding taking the initiative and responding to the opponent.

***FMFM
Readings***

FMFM 6, *Ground Combat Operations*, Chapter 6, pp. 6-1 to 6-29. Find this reading in the *FMFM Readings* (8800), pp. 399 to 419. This reading is descriptive in nature discussing everything from the purpose to conducting a defensive operation.

***FM/FMFRP
Readings***

wFM 100-5, *Operations (Draft 4 April 1997)*, Part 4, Chapter 2, pp. 2-0 to 2-21. Find this reading in the *FM/FMFRP Readings* (8800), pp. 51 to 62. This is a narrative, discussing in detail imperatives, framework, types, and phases of defensive operations.

wFM 100-15, *Corps Operations*, Chapter 6, pp. 6-4 to 6-6 and 6-15 to 6-16. Find this reading in the *FM/FMFRP Readings* (8800), pp. 85 to 89. This provides information concerning security force operations and transitioning to the offense.

For Further Study

Supplemental Readings

The following readings are **not** required. They are provided as recommended sources of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. They will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

wJoint Pub 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*.

wJoint Pub 3-10, *Doctrine for Rear Area Operations*.

wJoint Pub 3-15, *Joint Doctrine for Barriers, Obstacles and Mine Warfare*.

wFM 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Symbols*.

wGriffith, Samuel B., tran. *Sun Tzu: The Art of War*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 116 through 125.

Issues for Consideration

Purpose and Fundamentals	Under what circumstances might a commander desire to assume a defensive posture?
Doctrine	The defense is often termed less decisive than the offense. Why (or why not) is this the accepted interpretation?
Types of Defensive Operations	How do offensive action and maneuver apply to the two types of defensive operations? How is the battlespace organized for defensive operations?
Advantages and Disadvantages	The description of the conduct of the defense includes the phrase "forms of maneuver." To what degree does the defender actually conduct "maneuver"? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the forms of maneuver.
Forms of Maneuver	How might a retrograde accomplish the goal of defensive operations? The object of a withdrawal is to break contact with the enemy. Under what circumstances might such an object be desirable?
Operational Offensive/Tactical Defense	How is it feasible for the MEF to be considered in the operational offense when the GCE is conducting a defense?
Force Distribution	How are forces distributed to conduct the defense? How might the defender create circumstances most favorable to regaining the initiative from the attacker?
